MARY TODD LINCOLN.

REMINISCENCES AND LETTERS OF THE WIFE OF PRESIDENT LINCOLN.

By Emily Todd Helm.

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COMPARATIVELY little is known concerning the family history of Mary Todd Lincoln, although the press of the country has recorded much that has not been agreeable for her friends and relatives to read, often giving totally erroneous ideas of her; and thus the public has insensibly been prejudiced against her. Her ancestry can be traced to a long line of men distinguished in the early history of Pennsylvania and other States. She was related to the families of Parker, Bodley, Owens, McFarland, Findlay, Major, and Porter, of Pennsylvania. Her great grandfather, General Andrew Porter, was the close friend of Washington. The Porters furnished Pennsylvania with a governor, and two of them filled cabinet positions.

What is known of the Todd family is honorable. Of the covenanters captured at Bothwell Bridge, two hundred and fifty were sentenced to be transported to America. Two hundred of these were drowned in a shipwreck off the Orkneys; fifty escaped, and afterward took part in the defense of Londonderry. Among those drowned were Robert Todd of Fenwick and James Todd of Dunbar. In 1679, the same year in which these two were drowned, John Todd, their brother, fled from the persecutions of Claverhouse in Scotland, and sought refuge in Downs County, Ireland. In 1720 his son Robert Todd (born in 1697) came with his family from Ireland to Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, where he died in 1775. His first wife died before he left Ireland, but he married Isabella Hamilton in America. The mother of Robert Todd was Isabella Parker. Many families of note in Pennsylvania were related to her.

John Todd, son of the above Robert Todd, graduated at Princeton in 1749, located in Louisa County, Virginia, and became so distinguished as a Presbyterian minister, scholar, and educator, that it has been said, that no history of the Presbyterian Church in Virginia could be written without honorable [illegible] of him. T[illegible]er of this John Todd, David Todd (the great grandfather of Mrs. Lincoln), was born April 8, 1723. He was a farmer, and in 1760 bought lands of the proprietors of Pennsylvania on the south side of the Phœnixville and Peckowen Bridge road, near a corner where his brother Robert Todd kept a store. In 1783 he sold his farm, receiving $12,000 for it, and the next year removed to Kentucky, to join his sons Robert and Levi Todd. An older son, Colonel John, had been killed in a fight with the Indians at the Blue Licks, Kentucky, two years before; and it is said that it was because the mother grieved so at his loss and was so anxious to be with the sons who were left, that the removal from Pennsylvania was made. David Todd died in 1785, the year after he went to Kentucky.

His wife was Hannah Owens of Pennsylvania, daughter of Owen Owens. They had four sons, of whom one, Owen, settled in Ohio; and he, as well as the others, bore a brave part in the early Indian wars. The other three, John, Robert, and Levi Todd, were educated in Virginia, in a classical school taught by their uncle, the Rev. John Todd. The eldest, Colonel John Todd, studied law, and was the first civil governor and lieutenant-commander of what is now the great State of Illinois. His record or minute book is in the possession of the Chicago Historical Society, and forms an interesting chapter in the history of our country. England was forced to cede this rich country to the United States, as a fruit of the Revolutionary War, won by the valor of General George Rogers Clarke in 1778, and his valiant soldiers, who numbered among them the three Todd brothers. Upon Patrick Henry, the first Governor of Virginia, devolved the duty of appointing a lieutenant-commander of Illinois, and the man chosen for this responsible position (on the 12th of December, 1778) was Colonel John Todd. He had removed from Virginia to the County of Kentucky in 1775, and had become prominent in its house of delegates or representatives. In 1777 he was chosen to represent Kentucky in the General As-

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sembly of Virginia, and in 1778 he and his brothers formed a part of the expedition to Illinois County.

For three years Colonel John Todd held his position as lieutenant-commander, devoting most of the time to its interest. In 1780 he was again chosen a delegate to the Virginia legislature. In this year Kentucky (county) was divided into three counties—Lincoln, Jefferson, and Fayette; and Thomas Jefferson, then Governor of Virginia, appointed Colonel John Todd Colonel of Fayette County; Daniel Boone, Lieutenant-Colonel; and Thomas Marshall, Surveyor. During the summer of 1782, an Indian invasion aroused the county, and the militia was summoned to repel it. Colonel Todd, as senior colonel, took command of the little army sent in pursuit of the retreating savages. This force included Daniel Boone and many illustrious Kentuckians. On the 18th August, 1782, they came up with the Indians at the Blue Licks, and one of the most disastrous battles to the whites ever fought on Kentucky soil followed. Colonel John Todd fell at the head of his men, shot through the body. Nearly one-half of the little army was killed or wounded. Among the wounded were his brothers, General Levi and General Robert Todd. General Robert Todd was wounded also in the defense of McClellan's Fort (now Georgetown, Kentucky), in 1776. He continued an active soldier all through the troubles with the Indians.

General Levi Todd, the third brother, was the grandfather of Mrs. Lincoln. He was born in Pennsylvania in 1756, studied law and surveying, and was one of the defenders of Harrod's Fort in Kentucky, and also assisted General Ben Logan to hold St. Asaph's at Stanford, Kentucky. He was lieutenant in George Rogers Clarke's campaign for the conquest of Illinois; was appointed Major, Colonel, Brigadier, and Major-General of the Kentucky forces. He died in 1807 at Lexington, Kentucky. His wife was Jean Briggs, a daughter of Captain Samuel Briggs, who was a brother-in-law of General Ben Logan and one of his fifty picked men.

A son of General Levi Todd, Robert Smith Todd, was the father of Mary Todd Lincoln. He was a merchant of considerable wealth, and was for many years president of a bank at Lexington, Kentucky. He served in both branches of the Kentucky legislature, and was a man of generous and refined nature, belonging to the old Virginia school and known throughout the State for his hospitality. He served as captain in the War of 1812. His first wife was a daughter of Major Robert Parker of Lexington, Kentucky. His second wife was a daughter of Dr. Alexander Humphreys of Staunton, Virginia. Mary Todd Lincoln was but a child when this second marriage was made. Four of the brothers of Mrs. Lincoln entered the service of the Confederate States. One, Samuel Todd, was killed at the battle of Corinth; another, Alexander Todd, aged twenty-three years, was killed at the battle of Baton Rouge; and a third, David Todd, received a bullet wound that, after a long illness, caused his death in 1866. The fourth brother was a surgeon, and is still living, at Barnwell, South Carolina. Three of Mrs. Lincoln's sisters are living: Mrs. Frances Wallace of Springfield, Illinois; Mrs. Margaret Kellogg of Cincinnati, Ohio; and Mrs. Ben Hardin Helm (widow of General Ben Hardin Helm, who was killed at Chickamauga, September 20, 1863) of Elizabethtown, Kentucky.

An interesting account of Mrs. Lincoln in her girlhood is given in the following passage from a letter written to me by Mrs. Elizabeth L. Norris, of Garden City, Kansas, September 28, 1895:

> My first recollection of your sister Mary runs back to the time when your father lived on Short Street (Lexington, Ky.), before your sister Elizabeth married Ninian W. Edwards,* of Springfield, Ill. Mary Todd was then ten years old. I was in age between her and Frances (now Mrs. Dr. Wallace, of Springfield, Ill.), and while Frances and I were in harmony, I entered more into Mary's life. Mary was bright and talkative and warm-hearted. She was far advanced over girls of her age in education. She was a pupil of the celebrated Mr. Ward. He was a splendid educator; his requirements and rules were very strict, and woe to her who did not conform to the letter. Mary accepted the condition of things, and never came under his censure. We occupied the same room, and I can see her now as she sat on one side of a table, poring over her books, and I on the other, with a candle between. She was very studious, with a retentive memory and a mind that enabled her to grasp and thoroughly understand the lessons she was required to learn. Mr. Ward required his pupils to recite some of their lessons before breakfast. On a pleasant summer morning nature would hardly rebel; but what an ordeal to rise in winter by candle light and make the needful preparations to encounter the furious blasts! I have nothing but the most pleasant memories of her at that time. I never saw any display of temper or heard her reprimanded during the months I was an inmate of your father's home. Sixty-six years

* Ninian W. Edwards was the son of Governor Ninian Edwards, of Illinois. He was born April 15, 1809, near Frankfort, Kentucky. His father was at that time Chief Justice of Kentucky, but removed to Illinois the same year the son was born. Ninian Edwards was educated at Transylvania University, Lexington, Kentucky, where he met Elizabeth Todd, the eldest sister of Mrs. Lincoln, and she became his wife. His home was one of great hospitality. He served his State in a number of positions of honor. Mrs. Edwards was an exceedingly attractive woman. Her winning sweetness and gentleness of character have never been excelled, and have left an impression which is not likely to be forgotten.

ago children had few privileges. We had no amusements, no parties, nor books with charming little stories to stimulate us to acts of courtesy and kindness. Our standard library was the Bible and the Shorter Catechism, which we always carried to Sunday-school.

On one occasion Mary was with some young friends on a visit at Walnut Hills, near Lexington, Kentucky. They were startled by the report that Indians were approaching the house, and attempted to hide, each according to her impulse, under beds, in closets, anywhere, and Mary sought a refuge behind an old-fashioned screen that stood before an open fire-place. But feeling no safety there, she looked for a place of greater security, and not finding any to suit her, she stood in the center of the room and cried in a frantic tone: "Hide me, oh my Saviour, hide." It turned out that the Indians were only a friendly party and that there was no danger whatever.

Mrs. Norris writes further:

Mary and I each had a white dress, but Mary was not satisfied—they were too long and narrow. She liked pretty things, and wanted to be in the fashion. Hoops were worn at this time by women: not the steel ones—they came in later; but home-made affairs with small reeds, basted on the inside of the skirt, such as milliners used in drawn-silk bonnets. Properly worn, the effect of them was quite pretty. Mary admired them above all things, and was frantic for one; but it would have been an unheard of request to ask for it. After much worry and thought, she at last said, "Lizzie, I am going over to Mrs. Hostetter's and ask her for some of her weeping willows. We can make hoop-skirts and wear them to Sunday-school to-morrow." I agreed to it, and she put on her sunbonnet, and with a basket started on her errand. It was a long time before she returned, but she was abundantly supplied with the material, and deposited her basket with its precious burden in a closet in our room.

After tea we began our preparations. We seated ourselves upon the floor, and lost no time, but worked diligently. We were startled to find how late it was when my aunt (Mrs. Todd), on her way to her room, tapped on the door, telling us it was time to be in our beds. We did put out the light, and waited until we thought everybody was asleep; then we relighted our candle and worked until late in the night, when we hung up the finished garments with a thrill of delight. Our sleep was too short to be satisfactory, but we managed to get to breakfast in time. As soon as it was over, we rushed to our room. Mary was always quick in her movements, but now she made uncommon haste, and was dressed and out upon the street as I reached the front hall door. One moment and we would have been safe. But as fate would have it, Aunt caught a glimpse of me. One glance was enough to show her what we had been striving for. She reached the door in a second, and called Mary back. There we stood, a burlesque on vanity, as grotesque figures as eye need ever fall upon—in hoops that bulged in front and at the back, while they fell in at the sides, and with our narrow white dresses stretched over them to their utmost extent. We had basted the willows in just as they came off the tree, one end being very large and the other very small. Aunt looked us over from head to foot, and said, "What frights you are! Take those things off, and then go to Sunday-school."

We went to our room chagrined and angry. Mary burst into tears, and gave the first exhibition of temper I had ever known her to make. She thought we were badly treated. I was angry, but did not express myself quite so freely. It is well our display was confined to our own premises. If we had gone to the McCord Church, as we were so anxious to do, the congregation would have been convulsed with laughter and aunt too much mortified to lift up her head.

From Mr. Ward's school Mary went to a select French school kept by Mrs. Montell. Here she remained for four years, going to the school each Monday morning and not returning to her father's house until Friday evening. Nothing but French was spoken in this school, and Mary acquired a thorough knowledge of the language. She never gave it up, and always read the best French authors in the original. It was here also that she learned to dance.

While in Lexington as a young lady, Mary Todd never seemed interested in or manifested any desire for attention, although she mingled freely with the best society. Her special friends were Miss Margaret Wickliffe, afterwards Mrs. General William Preston, and Miss Bodley, afterwards Mrs. E. B. Owsley of Louisville, Kentucky. In a home pervaded by every refinement, her life flowed on quietly, free from sorrow or bereavement. She had a plump, round figure, and was rather short in stature. Her features were not regularly beautiful, but she was certainly very pretty, with her lovely complexion, soft brown hair, and clear blue eyes, and intelligent bright face that, having once seen, you would not easily forget. She was singularly sensitive. She was also impulsive, and made no attempt to conceal her feelings; indeed it would have been an impossibility had she desired to do so, for her face was an index to every passing emotion. Without desiring to wound, she occasionally indulged in sarcastic, witty remarks, that cut like a damascus blade; but there was no malice behind them. She was full of humor, but never unrefined. Perfectly frank and extremely spirited, her candor of speech and independence of thought often gave offense where none was meant, for a more affectionate heart never beat.

In 1837 Mary paid a visit to her sister Mrs. Ninian W. Edwards at Springfield, Illinois. She remained there three months before returning to her father's home at Lexington. She was then just nineteen years of age. In 1839 she again visited Springfield. Her wit and affability, not less than

her varied accomplishments, impressed both old and young. In 1842 she was married to Abraham Lincoln.

There has been so much written and printed upon the subject of Mrs. Lincoln's marriage, that I will only say that Mrs. Lincoln's family had no knowledge of any want of faith or honor on Mr. Lincoln's part. Mrs. Dr. Wallace, Mrs. Lincoln's sister, who is still living in Springfield, positively asserts that there was never but one wedding arranged between Mary Todd and Mr. Lincoln, and that was the one that occurred. Mr. Herndon says that it was a large wedding, and that Mrs. Lincoln was married in a white silk dress. This is an error, and he must have confused Mrs. Lincoln's wedding with that of her sister, Mrs. Wallace, who was married a little before. Mrs. Lincoln, by preference, had a quiet marriage. Mrs. Wallace says that on a Sunday morning Mr. Lincoln and Mary Todd called Mrs. Edwards to where they were sitting, and told her they had decided to be married that evening. Mrs. Wallace was sent for, and she says that she never worked harder in her life than on that day. Only a few people were present —Mr. Dresser, the minister, held a short service in his church, and afterward went up to Mr. Edwards's house, where the marriage took place. There were present Mr. and Mrs. Benjamin Edwards, Major and Mrs. John Todd Stuart, Dr. John Todd and family, Dr. and Mrs. Wallace, and Mr. and Mrs. Ninian W. Edwards. And the bride was clad in a simple white muslin dress.

As to the love affairs that Mr. Lincoln may have had or the offers he made of himself to others, Mrs. Wallace says that she does not know in regard to them. He may have had a misunderstanding with Mary Todd, but as the latter went to Springfield in 1839 and was married in 1842, there certainly could not have been so many love affairs as Mr. Lincoln's biographers enjoy giving him. Abraham Lincoln was a visitor at the house of Mr. Edwards before Mary Todd arrived at Springfield, and his well-known intimacy with her cousin, the accomplished John Todd Stuart,* and Mr. Joshua Speed at that time, speaks volumes in his favor as a promising man. Unless Mary Todd and Mr. Lincoln mutually desired it, there would have been no reason for the marriage.

It has also been said that Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln were not happy. Mrs. Wallace denies this emphatically, and the present writer's knowledge bears out Mrs. Wallace's assertion. They understood each other thoroughly, and Mr. Lincoln looked beyond the impulsive words and manner, and knew that his wife was devoted to him and to his interests. They lived in a quiet, unostentatious manner. She was very fond of reading, and interested herself greatly in her husband's political views and aspirations. She was fond of home, and made nearly all her own and her children's clothes. She was a cheerful woman, a delightful conversationalist, and well-informed on all the subjects of the day. The present writer saw Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln together some part of every day for six months at one time, but saw nothing of the unhappiness which is so often referred to. Many of Mr. Lincoln's ways, such as going to answer his own door-bell, annoyed her, and upon one occasion a member of her family said, "Mary, if I had a husband with a mind such as yours has, I wouldn't care what he did." This pleased her very much, and she replied, "It is very foolish—it is a small thing to complain of."

Here are extracts from some letters written by Mrs. Lincoln to the writer of the present sketch:

PASSAGES FROM LETTERS OF MRS. LINCOLN.

Springfield, February 3, 1856.—"Mr. Lincoln has just entered and announced that a Speaker has at last been elected at Washington; that Mr. Banks is the happy man. They have had great trouble in their political world."

Springfield, November 23, 1856.—"Your husband, like some of the rest of ours, has a great taste for politics and has taken much interest in the late contest, which has resulted very much as I expected, not hoped. Although Mr. Lincoln is, or was, a Frémont man, you must not include him with so many of those who belong to that party, an abolitionist. In principle he is far from it. All he desires is that slavery shall not be extended, let it remain where it is. My weak woman's heart was too Southern in feeling to sympathize with any but Fillmore. I have always been a great admirer of his—he made so good a President, and is so good a man, and feels the necessity of keeping foreigners within bounds. If some of you Kentuckians

* John Todd Stuart, one of the leading lawyers of Illinois, was a native of Kentucky. He graduated at Center College, Danville, studied law, and in 1828 located at Springfield. He was afterward a law partner of Abraham Lincoln and was major of a battalion in the Black Hawk War, where Abraham Lincoln commanded a company in the same battalion. He served in the Illinois legislature from 1832 to 1838, when he defeated Stephen A. Douglas for Congress. He served in Congress two terms, and then declined a reëlection; but he was reëlected in 1862 and served one term. He died November 20, 1885, aged 78 years.

had to deal with the *Wild Irish* as we housekeepers are sometimes called upon to do, the South would certainly elect Fillmore next time. The Democrats have been defeated in our State in their governor; so there is a crumb of comfort for each and all. What day is so dark that there is no ray of sunshine to penetrate the gloom? . . . Now sit down, and write one of your agreeable missives, and do not wait for a return of each from a staid matron, and, moreover, the mother of three noisy boys."

Springfield, September 20, 1857.—"The summer has strangely and rapidly passed away. Some portion of it was spent most pleasantly in traveling East. We visited Niagara, Canada, New York, and other points of interest. When I saw the large steamers at the New York landing, ready for their European voyage, I felt in my heart inclined to sigh that poverty was my portion. I often laugh and tell Mr. Lincoln that I am determined my next husband shall be rich."

Springfield, February 16, 1857.—"Within the last three weeks there has been a party almost every night, and some two or three grand fêtes are coming off this week. I may surprise you when I mention that I am recovering from the slight fatigue of a very large and, I really believe, a very handsome and agreeable entertainment, at least our friends flatter us by saying so. About 500 were invited; yet owing to an unlucky rain, three hundred only favored us by their presence. And the same evening, in Jacksonville, Colonel Warren gave a bridal party to his son, which occasion robbed us of some of our friends. You will think we have enlarged our borders since you were here."

Mrs. Lincoln was devoted to her children, and their loss was a distracting grief to her. Willie's death at Washington was a sorrow too deep for the President or Mrs. Lincoln to refer to. Mrs. Lincoln regularly attended the Presbyterian Church, and it was her request to be buried from the church where she had professed her faith. Her wedding-ring had engraved within it, "Love is eternal." The last words President Lincoln ever said to his wife were, "There is no city I desire so much to see as Jerusalem." With these words half-spoken, the fatal bullet entered his brain and struck him down by her side.

What wonder that such a shock was followed by great nervous prostration! Mrs. Lincoln went abroad to divert her mind. Mr. Paul Shipman, of Edgewater Park, New Jersey, who saw much of her during her sojourn in London and on the Continent, says: "Her residence was in sight of Bedford Square, and her life subservient to the welfare of Tad (her son), who was pursuing his studies under a tutor. She shunned, rather than courted attention, and desired peace and retirement above all things. I found her sympathetic, cordial, sensible, with that bonhomie so fascinating, with no trace of eccentricity in conduct or manner. She was simply a bright, wholesome, attractive woman, and I could not for the life of me recognize the Mrs. Lincoln of the newspapers in the Mrs. Lincoln I saw." A letter written by Mrs. Lincoln to Mrs. Shipman says: "I hope we will meet whilst we are abroad—you with your life so filled with love and happiness, whilst I, alas, am a weary exile. Without my beloved husband's presence the world is filled with gloom and dreariness for me."

In 1871 Mrs. Lincoln's son Tad died in Chicago, at the age of eighteen. "Ah, my dear friend," she said to one who knew her well, "you will rejoice when you know that I have gone to my husband and children." She was done with life. After years of failing health, in quiet seclusion from the world, shrinking from any publicity, and sensitive to every misrepresentation, sustaining the dignity of widowhood by perfectly appropriate behavior, she awaited the release from her sufferings. She died at the home of her sister, Mrs. Ninian W. Edwards, July 16, 1882. Three days later she was laid to rest by the side of her illustrious husband. The Rev. John A. Reid of Springfield expressed the feeling of many when he said, "The taller and the stronger one died, and the weaker is now dead. Growing and struggling together, one could not live without the other. Years ago Abraham Lincoln placed upon the finger of Mary Todd a ring bearing the inscription 'Love is eternal.' Side by side they walked until the demon of tragedy separated them. When the nation was shocked at the sad and dire event, how much more must she have been shocked who had years before become a part of his life. It cannot be any disrespect to her memory to say, that the bullet that sped its way and took her husband from earth took her too."